

that they give up their religious identity and become Muslims unless they freely choose to do so. The basis of this religious freedom in Islam is the categorical Qur’anic assertion: “There is no compulsion in religion...” (2:256). This is a categorical command, not a statement of fact.

The Qur’an and Prophetic tradition only enjoined Muslims as well as the followers of other faiths to engage in meaningful dialogue, cooperation and agreement on basic principles. This is what the Qur’an calls “a just word of common ascent,” between Muslims and the people of the Book to worship no one except God and not take one another as lords beside God (3:64).<sup>20</sup> In fact, the legal designation of *ahl al-Kitāb* (people of the Book) has been quite fluid. It came to include more and more communities as Muslims came to know more and more religious traditions.

The challenge is for all of us to have faith in God and compete with one another in righteous works. It follows from this challenge that all people of faith respect one another and that they believe in all of God’s revelations. The Qur’an presents the followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism not only with a great challenge, but with a great promise as well. The promise is this: “Were the people of the Book to abide by the Torah, the Gospel and that which was sent down to them from their Lord [i.e. the Qur’an], they would be nourished with provisions from above them and from beneath their feet” (5:66).

## Chapter Four

### **Qur’anic Revealed Scripture vs. Judeo-Christian Scripture: A Muslim Perspective of the Universal and Particular in the Scriptures**

Khaled Troudi

Muslims believe that the Qur’an, as the universal Guidance, is designated to provide a direct discourse that speaks to all human beings, while the particular one, the previous Judeo-Christian scriptures, has, according to the Islamic tradition, specific spiritual and temporal affairs designated to a specific nation under the leadership of God’s prophet. I examine why Muslims believe the Qur’an to be the

predominant (*muhaymin*) revealed scripture (the “universal”) while the Judeo-Christian scriptures represent the “particular.” An analysis of various Qur’anic verses will provide the methodology that is used to undertake the different approaches of this study.

In Islam, according to the Qur’an (42:15), the idea of believing in all revealed books becomes an article of faith. Many Qur’anic passages, such as (43:4), (13:39), and (56:78), indicate that “all scriptures stem from and are parts of a single source, heavenly archetype called ‘the Mother of the Book’ (*Umm al-Kitāb*) and also ‘The Hidden Book’ (*al-Kitāb al-Maknūn*).”<sup>21</sup> Thus for Muslims, the Qur’an, especially the narrative passages of the previous prophets, represents the major theological source of the unity of the revealed scriptures in which the prophets are the dominant figures. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad and all Muslims are obligated to be the first believers in the prophethood of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus and in the truth of the scriptures brought by them, without making any distinction among them. Moreover, Qur’anic verses such as 42:13, 3:95, 2:130-33 and 22:78 affirmed Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to “share a common trunk of divine revelation, and their original can be considered to be not just one religious tradition, but one religion.”<sup>22</sup>

However, some western scholars criticize this belief by claiming that Prophet Muhammad made no connection with earlier scriptures during the first four years of his prophetic career. On the other hand, they also assert that he saw Islam “within the perspective of the earlier Biblical religions.”<sup>23</sup> They further claim that “many Muslims prefer to stress the passages that are critical of other religions and ignore or explain away the verses that praise other religions.”<sup>24</sup> They claim that “Muslims see other religions in terms of Islam, which in their eyes is the perfect religion.”<sup>25</sup>

However, the basic problem with these arguments lies in the separation of the chronological study of Prophet Muhammad’s career and the Qur’an into two separate periods, the Makkan and the Madinan, a practice that most modern scholars fully endorse. A critical study of the Qur’anic passages, according to Rahman, “reveals rather a gradual development, a definite transition where the late Meccan phase has basic affinities with the early Madinan phase; indeed, one can see the latter in the former.”<sup>26</sup> What they fail to understand is that the majority of Muslim exegetes were in fact placing emphasis on Judaism and Christianity whose adherents, having been favored with both prophets

and a Book (whether the *Injil* or the Torah), therefore had to be judged by more stringent standards than people of other faiths.

Furthermore, Rashid Rida states that the “messenger comes only to confirm what the intellect comprehends, clarifying and elucidating matters of vital significance, such as what the hereafter will be like and the ways of worship not pleasing to God.”<sup>27</sup> Rida also clarifies the minimum of human responsibility in relation to God’s purpose are belief in God and the Last Day. Anyone who has been exposed to this message is bound to believe it, whether or not he or she has had the benefit of a prophetic revelation. Deeply rooted in Islamic theology is the idea that all nations have been sent prophets with specific scriptural messages that differ somewhat in their details. According to verse 5:3 of the Qur’an, this cycle of Revelation and prophethood runs its course with the advent of Islam.

According to Islamic tradition, “the Book with the truth is a summary of God’s repeated interference in history, which thereby gains the coherence of a pattern made decisively clear.”<sup>28</sup> The Qur’anic verse 5:48 and similar verses clearly confirm the idea of a predominant revealed scripture. All Muslims must accept that God sent down the Qur’an in truth as a confirmer of the Books or of all revelations that have come before it and as a protector over them. In addition, the notion of the finality of prophethood is clear in Qur’anic verse 33:40 and similar verses, which mention that all Muslims must believe that Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet sent by God to humanity.

However, the Qur’anic message emphasizes that Prophet Muhammad is the only legitimate person who has connected the “new” religion of Islam with the Biblical tradition, especially with the prophets of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, through which Abraham is a descendant of both Noah and Adam. Accordingly, Muslims state that all “the Jews, and naturally the Christians, are thus invited to believe the Arab prophet and to consider him as the continuator of their tradition.”<sup>29</sup> Muslim exegetes connected the idea of predominant revealed scripture with the history of the prophets, and the Jews and Christians. They regarded Judaism and Christianity as true religions that were forms of the one true religion, and which were valid for a certain period of history. According to the Islamic tradition, God sent prophets Moses and Jesus only to the children of Israel while Prophet Muhammad came with a mission to the whole world. This understanding has led Muslim exegetes to state that the missions of Moses and Jesus were limited in

time and space. For these reasons, Muslims believe the mission attributed to Prophet Muhammad is universal and not limited by geographical or ethnological ethnic boundaries.

Muslims consider the Qur'an as a message to all mankind, a Revelation, which came to ensure the victory of God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) over paganism and to correct Judeo-Christian misunderstanding of the Bible as well as Christian errors concerning Jesus. With regards to the existence of a one 'true religion' and the validity of its legislations, Muslim exegetes maintain that there is a primordial original pure faith and that Islam is its manifestation for humanity. As such, its legislations, although containing different laws and commandments to those of earlier scripture, are fundamentally the same, replacing those no longer suitable for modern times.

## Chapter Five

### **Exegesis, Social Science and Judaism in the Qur'an**

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Throughout Islamic history, religious scholars have been viewed as public intellectuals whose opinions have been valued on all matters. Indeed, in some periods, these scholars excelled in other disciplines, including physics, algebra, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine. However, views expressed in Qur'anic commentaries received little critical examination, which is a necessary endeavor for contemporary Islamic reform. I briefly address here the views of some of these exegetes and Qur'an scholars, in terms of their views on the Jews in the Qur'an.

Muhammad ibn Bahader ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī (d. 1391) explained that exegesis is needed for three reasons: people differ in their intellectual abilities, so some readers may need assistance to comprehend; parts of the Qur'an are built on certain assumptions that are not apparent to the common person; and some words may carry multiple meanings and can be deciphered only by learned specialists. Al-Zarkashī presented key knowledge requirements for prospective scholars in the field, including classical Arabic diction and phonetics and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). He explained that some parts of the Qur'an could be difficult to comprehend because of *ʿumūm*